

## September 7, 2025

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**BIG IDEA** – God does not just want us to **BE** together; He wants us to **BEHAVE** together.

**Scripture Focus** – John 17:23 "I am in them and you are in me. **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.**"

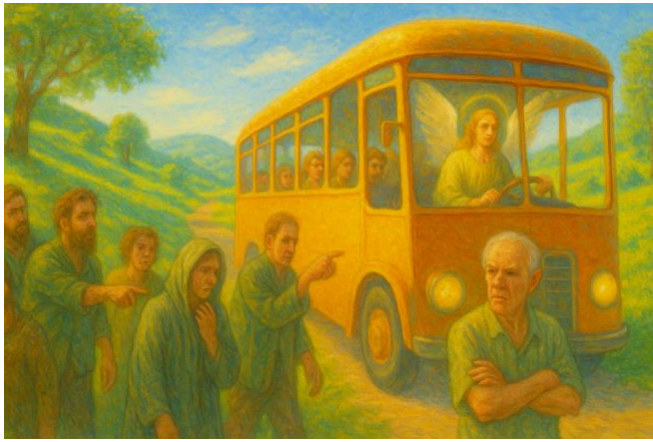
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### THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM IS KILLING US

Grey Town in C.S. Lewis' [The Great Divorce](#).



The narrator inexplicably finds himself in a grim and joyless city, the "grey town", where it rains continuously, even indoors, which is either Hell or Purgatory depending on whether or not one stays there. He eventually finds a bus stop for those who desire an excursion to some other place. ("The grey town" is only called such; the destination later turns out to be the foothills of Heaven). He waits in line for the bus and listens to the arguments between his fellow passengers. As they await the bus's arrival, many of them quit the line in disgust before the bus pulls up. The driver is an angel who casually shields his face from the passengers. **Once the few remaining passengers have boarded, the bus flies upward, off the pavement into the grey, rainy sky.**



The ascending bus breaks out of the rain clouds into a clear, pre-dawn sky, and as it rises its occupants' bodies change from being normal and solid into being transparent, faint, and vapor-like. When it reaches its destination the passengers on the bus—including the narrator—are gradually revealed to be [ghosts](#). Although the country they disembark into is the most beautiful they have ever seen, every feature of the landscape, including streams of water and blades of grass, is unyieldingly solid compared to themselves: It causes them immense pain even to walk on the grass, whose blades pierce their shadowy feet, and even a single leaf is far too heavy for any to lift.

**The Great Divorce does a great job of not just describing hell as miserable, but it shows the human condition as one that pursues isolation over community.**

Heaven and hell aren't opposite because of God's presence – which is the most important. It's also because of what happens with all of us together.

*“Heaven is this ever-increasing, further up, further into joy, into God, into life. Hell is the opposite of that. It's an everlasting movement away from God. [and from one another].”*

**People crave freedom, but without community it will eventually become isolation. The Bible affirms individuality but only in the context of belonging, accountability, and unity.**

In C.S. Lewis' description of individualism. [Matt Smethurst - Carey Nieuwhof, Episode 750](#). This idea that “I belong to myself.”

[Jonathan Lehman](#) says, “Individualism is not so much anti community as it is anti-authority. We don't want anyone else telling us what to do.”

Tim Keller was constantly bringing the **culture** to realize that they were **trying to get God to live on their terms**, rather than being willing to live on God's. **And that's the essence of sin. That's the essence of rebellion. That's the essence of idolatry.**

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**Why does God want us to be together?**

## And what would happen if we really were one?

The Apostle John was able to capture Jesus' future intent for what would become the gathering of those who had committed their lives to follow His ways. But the fact is, Jesus is the one who spoke about the way his followers would treat one another in being and making disciples – they would be **one**. **As the beauty and mystery of Jesus and the Father being one, or the supernatural riddle of a husband and wife becoming one, Jesus also wanted his followers to be one. What could happen if we unified? That's what we will discover this morning.**

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### The Bible doesn't erase individuality but calls individuals into unity

- *1 Peter 2:5* – Each believer is a “living stone,” **built together into a spiritual house**.
- *Romans 12:4–5* – Many members, with different functions, but **one body in Christ**.
- *Galatians 3:28* – No longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female — all are **one in Christ Jesus**.

The Bible emphasizes the intrinsic worth of each individual while also highlighting the importance of community.

We are not a church because we gather in a building —

- We are a church because we both belong and behave!
- We belong to the body of Christ and behave like family.

Ever heard the old phrase...

“Blood is thicker than water.”

[Wikipedia](#) says, “Blood is thicker than water is a proverb in English meaning that familial bonds will always be stronger than other relationships.”

It turns out the real definition is opposite of what we think! It really means...

“The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb.”

William Jenkyn referenced the proverb in its modern form in a 1652 sermon: “Blood is thicker (we say) then [*sic*] water; and truly the blood of Christ beautifying any of our friends and children, should make us prefer them before those, between whom and us there's only a watery relation of nature.”

Jesus was very clear about His mission, but he was also very clear about ours!

### John 13:34-35

So now I am giving you a new commandment: **Love each other**. Just as I have

loved you, you **should love each other**. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

**How many times did Jesus say, “love each other?”**

John follows up later with the **WHY!**

### **John 17:20-23**

I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. **I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me**, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. **May they -**

- experience such perfect unity
- that the world will know that you sent me and
- that you love them as much as you love me.

The **WHY – we would know**

- **We can be one**, like Jesus and the Father.
- Experience “**teleioó**” – **completion or perfection**.
- **God loves us as much as His only Son.**

**What is mission critical then?**

**What was Jesus’ mission critical?** To die that I might live. To make redemption possible for every person through his life, death, and resurrection. This mission was essential for humanity's salvation and reconciliation with God.

**As an individual, what would you say is your mission critical?** Love God, love and share the good news with others.

**As a community, a gathering of folks who follow Jesus, what do you think is our mission critical?** To be one, even as God is one.

**Because, if we can’t love each other, how in the world would we expect people to believe that God is able to change a life?**

**If I can’t get along with you, how can anyone expect that I could ever get along with someone who is broken and far from God?**

**We’ve got to quit displaying petty preferences and disagreements in our differences and focus on love, forgiveness and reconciliation.**

**1. Unity begins with making Jesus #1 – personal faith leads to corporate strength.**

- **James 2:14** What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say,

“Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

**2. Unity is not optional but essential to God's mission and our mission. It marked this new thing called “The Church” because they were together.**

- **Acts 1:14** They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.

**3. Love for one another is the defining mark of the Church.**

**Community is God's chosen instrument to display His glory to the world.**

- **Hebrews 10:24-25** Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

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### Application.

**1. Pursue Reconciliation:** When conflicts arise, seek reconciliation promptly.

[Matthew 5:23-24](#) emphasizes the importance of **resolving disputes to maintain the integrity of worship and fellowship.**

**2. Embrace Forgiveness:** [Colossians 3:13](#) instructs, “**Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you.**” Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” Forgiveness is essential in maintaining the health and unity of the community.

**3. Foster Open Communication:** [Ephesians 4:15](#) advocates for “**speaking the truth in love.**” Clear and compassionate communication helps resolve misunderstandings and build trust.

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What is the Spirit of God saying to us... to you?

Unity means every time, anytime, we are together - God wants us to **BE** together; He also wants us to **BEHAVE** together.

Unity is a commitment to focus on **love, forgiveness and reconciliation.**

Unity is a theme where God commands a blessing!

**Psalms 133:1-3** **How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!** For **harmony is as precious** as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe. **Harmony is as refreshing** as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. **And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.**

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## SCRIPTURES

### **John 13:34-35 NLT**

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

### **John 17:20-23 NLT**

I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

### **James 2:14 NLT**

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

### **Acts 1:14 NLT**

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### **Hebrews 10:24-25 NLT**

Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

### **Psalms 133:1-3 NLT ON SCREEN**

How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony! For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe. Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.

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## **NOTES**



### **C.S. Lewis's Description of Hell in the Grey Town**

#### **Overview of the Grey Town**

- The Grey Town represents a form of Hell in C.S. Lewis's "The Great Divorce."
- It is depicted as a dull, drab city filled with abandoned buildings.
- The inhabitants are isolated, often fighting and arguing, which contributes to their loneliness.

## Characteristics of the Grey Town

Feature	Description
<b>Atmosphere</b>	Constantly grey and rainy, creating a dreary environment.
<b>Inhabitants</b>	Souls who prefer isolation and are consumed by their own pride and selfishness.
<b>Living Conditions</b>	People can create their surroundings through imagination, but these are insubstantial.
<b>Social Dynamics</b>	Inhabitants often move further away from each other due to conflicts, leading to isolation.

## Symbolism and Themes

- The Grey Town symbolizes the consequences of living a self-centered life.
- It serves as a purgatorial space where souls confront their choices and the reality of their existence.
- The idea of comfort in Hell is explored, as many souls choose to remain despite the misery, illustrating the struggle between desire for joy and the comfort of familiar suffering.

## Conclusion

In "The Great Divorce," the Grey Town is a powerful metaphor for the spiritual state of souls who reject the opportunity for redemption, illustrating the themes of pride, isolation, and the consequences of one's choices in the afterlife.

## C.S. Lewis's Concept of Hell

C.S. Lewis presents a unique perspective on hell, describing it as a place of self-inflicted misery rather than merely a punishment from God. He emphasizes that hell represents an everlasting movement away from God, contrasting sharply with the joy and fulfillment found in heaven.

### The Nature of Hell

- **Self-Inflicted Misery:** Lewis suggests that hell is not just a consequence of divine wrath but also a result of human choices. He famously stated, "Hell is locked from the inside," indicating that individuals choose to remain in their misery.
- **Imagery of Hell:** In "The Great Divorce," Lewis depicts hell as a vast, grey town where inhabitants are isolated and constantly moving away from one another. This imagery illustrates the loneliness and despair that characterize hell.

## Comparison with Heaven

- **Size and Significance:** Lewis argues that hell is ultimately insignificant compared to heaven. He states, "All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your

earthly world," highlighting that the joys of heaven far outweigh the sorrows of hell.

- **Joy vs. Misery:** The experiences of joy in heaven are portrayed as infinitely greater than the collective miseries of hell. Lewis suggests that even the smallest joy in heaven would overshadow all the suffering found in hell.

This understanding of hell as a mere crack in the grandeur of heaven serves to emphasize the vastness and beauty of divine joy, contrasting it with the bleakness of self-imposed separation from God.

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### What does the Bible say about individualism?

Individualism is an approach to decision-making that presumes benefits for an individual person should be given higher priority than benefits for a wider group. In other words, individualism says the needs of each person outweigh the needs of the larger culture or group. As with any human philosophy, individualism can be used beneficially or as a pretext for abuse. As one might expect, the Bible denounces an extreme approach to individualism. Scripture suggests that each person is morally obligated to consider others as more important than oneself. At the same time, Scripture powerfully speaks to the value of the individual. In some ways, individualism has biblical merit, usually in narrow, spiritually related circumstances.

**The Bible contains examples of individualist thinking.** This is most often seen where someone chooses to do what is moral or right, regardless of whether the wider culture approves (Joshua 24:15; Acts 5:29). Jesus indicated that following Him might offend others (Matthew 10:34–38)—and that's especially true when the Christian individual refuses to revel in something the larger culture thinks is acceptable (John 15:19). Christ also spoke positively of a person's right to decide how to use his own property and abilities (Matthew 21:33–41; 25:14–30).

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**Blood is thicker than water.**

## Historical Context

The phrase is often thought to have originated from a longer proverb: **"The blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb."** This version implies that the bonds formed by choice (like friendships or alliances) can be stronger than those formed by birth.

The earliest known written reference to a similar sentiment can be found in the **Middle Ages**, particularly in German and English literature.

## Linguistic Roots



- The phrase has been translated and adapted in various forms across cultures, emphasizing the idea of loyalty and kinship.
  - In some interpretations, it highlights the importance of chosen relationships over biological ones, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of loyalty and connection.
  - Overall, while the phrase is commonly used to emphasize the strength of family ties, its deeper origins suggest a more complex view of relationships.
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### Tim Keller's Disordered Loves

Sin is a worship disorder.  
Sin is a worship problem.

Fundamentally. It's not merely an issue of breaking commandment.

In fact, it was **Martin Luther that pointed out that we never break commandments two through ten without first breaking commandment number one!**

**If you think about the Ten Commandments, we never break commandments two through ten without first having broken commandment number one.**

**Anytime we're breaking two through ten. It's because we have another God before us.**

We have someone else. We have something else that we're looking to.  
But if we were completely happy in Jesus, if we were completely content in Jesus, we would never break commandments two through ten.

**So, worship is, foundational, to how we're meant to live and therefore a lack of worship or misplaced worship, because that's the issue.** It's not that, you know, it's not that we're either going to worship or not. The question is, **what are we going to worship?**

What if an idol is a good thing? A good thing that's been turned into an ultimate thing.

How do you know that that's happened? How do you know that you've taken a good thing and turned it into an ultimate thing?

How do you respond when that good thing in your life is threatened or lost if it's threatened or lost and you respond with sadness or disappointment, that's normal.

But if you respond with downright devastation and despair, well, that's probably evidence that that good thing has been given a promotion it didn't deserve and has been inflated into an ultimate thing.

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## **Thriving Together: The Importance of Community in the Christian Life By Dave Block.**

In a world increasingly marked by isolation and individualism, the Christian call to community stands as a beacon of hope and belonging. God designed humanity not to journey alone but to flourish in fellowship with one another. The importance of community is deeply embedded in the fabric of Scripture, illustrating that spiritual growth, support, and love are found in the context of relationships. This article will explore the biblical foundations of community, its role in the believer's life, and practical steps to cultivate and cherish these vital connections.

While community is a source of immense blessing, it is not without its challenges. Differences in personality, preferences, and opinions can lead to conflict. However, these challenges can be opportunities for growth and deeper unity when approached with grace and humility.

- 1. Pursue Reconciliation:** When conflicts arise, seek reconciliation promptly. [Matthew 5:23-24](#) emphasizes the importance of resolving disputes to maintain the integrity of worship and fellowship.
- 2. Embrace Forgiveness:** [Colossians 3:13](#) instructs, "Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving each other**; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Forgiveness is essential in maintaining the health and unity of the community.
- 3. Foster Open Communication:** [Ephesians 4:15](#) advocates for "**speaking the truth in love**." Clear and compassionate communication helps resolve misunderstandings and build trust.

In a culture that often values independence over interdependence, the Christian community stands as a testament to God's design for human flourishing. It is within the context of relationships that we find encouragement, growth, support, and love. By investing in and cherishing our Christian communities, we honor God and experience the fullness of life He desires for us.



## **10 Reasons for Going to Church By Rhonda Stoppe**

1. To Hear the Preaching of the Word
2. To Participate in Corporate Worship
3. Because Iron Sharpens Iron
4. To Exercise Your Gift
5. To Encourage Your Pastor
6. To Find Godly Mentors
7. To Teach Your Kids to Love Jesus and the Church

8. To be a Light to Your Community
9. To Bear Each Other's Burdens
10. Because it is what followers of Jesus do – they gather together.